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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the development of women's sports during the first three decades of the 20th century and compares it with the development of the women's movement during the same period. In so doing, the paper focuses on the views of female physical educators and female athletes and on their participation in sport. These views and the relationship of these views are then compared to the views of women and of their participation in society held by two groups involved in the women's movement, feminists and reformers. It is argued that, within both movements, both groups of women held different and diametrically opposed views of women and their participation in sport and society. It is concluded that, in both movements, a schism developed between the two groups which held diametrically opposed conceptions of women and their rights. It is also concluded that the lack of unity within each group is responsible, in large measure, for the approximate 40 year period of acquiescence experienced by both the women's sports movement and the women's movement. (Author/JMK)

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REFORMIST AND FEMINIST VIEWS OF SPORT IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY.

This paper examines the development of women's sports during the first three decades of the twentieth century and compares it with the development of the women's movement during the same period. In so doing, the paper focuses principally on the views of women and their participation in sport held by two groups of women involved in the women's sports movement, the women physical educators and the female athletes. These views and the relationship of these views are then compared to the views of women and their participation in society held by two groups of women involved in the women's movement, the feminists and the reformers. It is argued that within both movements, the two groups of women held different and diametrically opposed views of women and their participation within each circumstance, sport and society respectively. The women physical educators argued that women were fundamentally different from men in physical, psychological, and moral terms and advocated a philosophy and a sports program that reflected the difference between and inequality of the sexes. Similarly, the feminists argued that women were fundamentally different from men in economic, social, and physical terms and advocated legislation that reflected the difference between and inequality of the sexes. In contrast, female athletes exemplified the view that women were not significantly different in physical, psychological, and moral terms and participated in sports programs that reflected the similarity between and equality of the sexes. Similarly, the reformers argued that women were not significantly different in economic, social, and physical terms and advocated legislation that reflected the similarity between and equality of the sexes. It is concluded that in both movements, a schism developed between the two groups which held diametrically opposed conceptions of women and their rights. As a consequence, the lack of unity within each group is responsible, in large measure, for the approximate forty year period of acquiescence experienced by both the women's sports movement and the women's movement.

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REFORMIST AND FEMINIST VIEWS OF SPORT
IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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For approximately two decades the women's sports movement and the women's movement have undergone considerable transformation and experienced phenomenal growth. However, for forty years prior to this period, from approximately 1925 to 1965, both movements witnessed a period of acquiescence during which there was little, if any, advancement.

In addition to the fact that each movement focuses on the rights and freedoms of women, the similarity of the historical development of each during the last eighty years or so suggests that there are perhaps other similarities between the two movements; similarities that have contributed to the approximate forty year period of acquiescence experienced by these movements.

This paper examines the development of women's sports during the first three decades of the twentieth century and compares it with the development of the women's movement during the same period. In so doing, the paper focuses principally on the views of women and their participation in sport held by two groups of women involved in the women's sport movement, the women physical educators and the female athletes. These views and the relationship of these views are then compared to the views of women and their participation in society held by two groups of women involved in the women's movement, the reformers and the feminists. It is suggested that within both

movements, the two groups of women held different and diametrically opposed views of women and their participation within each circumstance, sport and society respectively. As a consequence of these views, a schism developed in each of these groups and the lack of unity deterred the advancement of each of these movements from 1925 to 1965.

Women's intercollegiate sport began in the late nineteenth century and continued to develop into the first two decades of the twentieth century. Although varsity competition was not extensive, evidence suggests there was an interest in promoting highly skilled competition in educational circles in such activities as basketball, track and field, field hockey, golf, and tennis.

In the early 1920's, however, opposition to competitive sports for women appeared. This opposition was a direct response to the Amateur Athletic Union's decision to assume control of women's track and field and send a team to the Paris Women's International Athletic Games in 1922 and later to the Olympic Games. Women's sports leaders, physical educators, and other women who directed sport for girls and women opposed the AAU decision and immediately withdrew from the organization. In 1923 they formed the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation.

These leaders immediately opposed highly intense and skilled intercollegiate and interscholastic competition and advocated the playday, a new form of competition which reflected the contemporary societal view of women at the turn of the century. The view of women at this time was still influenced by the Victorian ideal of womanhood which depicted women as weak, frail, and dependent creatures who were to be beautiful, delicate, refined, sensitive, pious, modest, gentle, and religious. Women were seen as distinctly different from men and as occupying separate spheres. They were

considered biologically, anatomically, physiologically, and psychologically inferior as well as morally and spiritually superior to men. They therefore needed a distinctly different form of sports competition as they could not withstand the physical or emotional strain of highly skilled, competitive, and intense sports competition.

The women physical educators claimed that the playday was a morally superior form of sports competition that was not physically or psychologically damaging to women. The playday was devoted to play for play's sake, was based upon an egalitarian philosophy which emphasized participation of the masses, and represented an intrinsic regard for sport that focused on the development of good citizenship, community service, and lasting social values. According to these leaders, men's competitive sports programs were devoted to winning, were based on an elitist philosophy which emphasized competition of the skilled athlete to the exclusion of the masses, and represented an instrumental regard for sport that focused on winning to the exclusion of educational values.

The playday thus came to represent a "female" sporting form which reflected the contemporary view of the physiological, psychological, and moral or spiritual characteristics of women. By the mid-1930's, the playday had become the dominant form of athletic competition for girls and women in educational circles.

With the change in sports programs for girls and women in educational institutions, the athletically inclined and skilled female turned to other programs for skill development and competition. In the years to follow, competitive sports programs for girls and women were sponsored by the Amateur Athletic Union which sponsored competition in such activities as track and field and swimming; industry which sponsored competition in such activities as basketball, softball, and bowling; and national sports

organizations which sponsored competition in such activities as skating, tennis, golf, and gymnastics.

These programs, like the men's interscholastic and intercollegiate programs, focused on the elite, highly-skilled athlete and were devoted more so to competition than participation. Intense training and practice prepared such notables as Gertrude Ederle, Helen Wills, Mary Browne, Glenna Collette, and Babe Didrikson for victories in national and international competition.

Although these women never articulated a formal philosophy of sports participation, they represented, through their participation and achievement in sport, a view of women that opposed the view of the women's sports leaders. They were physically strong, competitive, aggressive, and independent women who were far from being dependent, fragile, and weak. They easily withstood the highly intense and competitive amateur sports competition. Their performance in sport suggested that women were equal to men physically, psychologically, and morally, and could withstand the physical and psychological challenge of highly competitive sports.

These female athletes were ostracized by the female sports leaders. The opposing views of women and sports competition held by these two groups of women prevented the formation of any sort of alliance that would further the advance of women's sports. Consequently, women's sports did not advance, to any significant degree, until the 1960's.

A similar development is evidenced in the women's movement during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The women's movement began in America around the middle of the nineteenth century. Early feminists proposed that all men and women were created equal. Insisting that men and women were identical in capacities and responsibilities, these women attacked the fundamental premise underlying the relations between the sexes--the

notion of distinct male and female spheres that was based on their ideas about female nature that assumed and depended on the subordination of women. Rather than concentrating exclusively on suffrage, the early feminists advocated a complete transformation in society and defined women's problems in a broad sense.

This view, however, was not widely accepted, as it challenged ideas that were the "cornerstone" of society; the family, marriage, and the church depended upon the notion of the woman's sphere. And so, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the women's movement lost its radical perspective, narrowed its vision, and focused increasingly on the issue of the vote. The vote could be supported without challenging assumptions about women's nature and separate spheres and thus without advocating sweeping social change and a complete transformation in society's view of women.

The ideology of the women's movement changed and conformed to the contemporary societal view of women, one that reinforced the Victorian ideal of the emotional, mothering, dependent female. Rather than argue for the similarity of the sexes, the ideology was based on the unchangeable differences which distinguished the sexes and recognized the separate spheres for men and women.

As women fought for the vote, based on the acceptance of female distinctiveness, they chose the most expedient argument, one that exploited the traditional assumptions about a woman's place. Both sexes had a unique role to play in society. Women, as moral and spiritual creatures, would humanize and elevate the moral level of government by extending democracy and eliminating social injustice.

With this argument, which emphasized the traditional conception of women's proper role, the women's movement broadened its appeal and

neutralized its opposition. The vote came to symbolize the entire struggle for equality and embody all demands of the women's movement.

With the victory of suffrage it was realized that the vote did not guarantee equality for women. Consequently, the National Women's Party proposed the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923. The Amendment, which claimed that "men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction," sought to obliterate sex as a functional classification within the law and thereby end discrimination and extend freedom won in suffrage. This proposal, however, became a focal point of controversy and prevented the development of a united women's movement.

The basis of the controversy was that the two groups of women, the reformers and the feminists, held different views of women. The Amendment was opposed by the reformers of the League of Women Voters. The reformers, under the leadership of Carrie Chapman Catt, held that suffrage had secured most of their fundamental rights and largely ended discrimination. The reformers were devoted to social reform, to "save the nation from its sins." They viewed the Amendment as a direct threat to the special legislation devoted to the protection of women; that is, it would endanger wage and labor laws for women, undermine support laws for wives and children, and terminate special penalties in the laws for rape and sexual offenses against women. The reformers believed that physical and psychological differences prevented women from competing on a basis of total equality with men. Consequently, special labor laws were required if females were to be protected against exploitation and given first treatment in society.

The Amendment was endorsed by the feminists of the National Women's Party. Under the leadership of Alice Paul, the feminists, who aimed to

transform the attitudes toward women, argued that the vote was an intermediate step toward equality. They viewed the Amendment as a "blanket" Amendment that would outlaw all discriminatory legislation. The feminists opposed special legislation, such as the protective legislation, that set women apart as a separate class and assigned them a place less equal than that of men. The feminists maintained that women and men were physically and psychologically equal and that protective legislation discriminated against females. Moreover, women could not be free until they achieved absolute identity with men in all areas of public policy regulated by law.

Effectively the controversy was based on the fact that the reformers considered women as a weaker sex whose rights would be destroyed unless safeguarded by special legislation; whereas the feminists considered females as exactly the same as men in all of their principal attributes and argued for legislation that recognized these similarities. The reformist position is seen as a continuation of the argument which reflected the societal view of women and won the suffrage victory, while the feminist view represents the more broad-based view of the early feminist movement.

The differences of these two views led to irreconcilable differences between the groups, and these differences caused a division in the women's movement. Instead of advancing together to extend rights and freedom to women, the movement ceased to exist as a powerful force in American society by the mid-1930's. The collapse of the movement gave way to the widespread acceptance of the "New Victorianism" which deterred the advance of the women's movement for another thirty years.

It is suggested that the women's sports leaders, like the social reformers, held views of women that reflected the societal views of women in the early twentieth century. Reflecting the notion of reform, the

reformers viewed women's rights as a crusade to save the nation from its sins. The women's sports leaders essentially did the same thing by declaring women incapable of highly skilled and competitive sports competition and claiming the playday as a morally and socially superior form of competition.

The women athletes, like the feminists, viewed men and women as equal and the same in all their principal attributes. Each sought equal opportunity of participation in sport and society respectively.

The lack of unity within each movement deterred the advance of the women's sports movement and the women's movement in the early twentieth century, and prevented the mutual support of each movement that eventually developed in the 1970's.

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